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# FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENGLISH IN THE NORMAL SCHOOL: A COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

## PART I. HISTORY

This committee was appointed in the spring of 1915, and began work at once. The personnel of the committee has remained unaltered except that Miss Lydia Jones, of the State Normal School at Geneseo, New York, took, in the winter of 1916, the place made vacant by the resignation of Miss Ida Mendenhall, of the same school.

Three tasks confronted the Committee. The first was to limit the scope of the inquiry, since it was manifestly impossible, with the limited funds at the disposal of the Committee and the limited leisure of the members for work, to investigate all the problems implicated in a study of English teaching in the normal schools of the United States. By unanimous consent the inquiry was limited to the public normal schools, as distinguished from normal schools conducted under private and denominational auspices. This was done for obvious reasons. The Committee then decided to limit its study to the English work in two-year, the so-called "standard," normal courses. This was deemed advisable because in most sections of the country the two-year course seems destined to be, for many years to come, the typical normal-school course. (It may well be that the principles laid down herein for two-year courses apply somewhat closely to three- and four-year courses, but the Committee does not affirm this.)

The second task was to make a thorough study of the conditions now prevailing in the teaching of English in the standard normal schools of the United States. The best method of doing this seemed the questionnaire method. After a great deal of study and correspondence the Committee formulated the questionnaire and sent a copy of each one to the 225 public normal schools in the United States. These normal schools were divided into six sections, and a member of the Committee was placed in charge of each section. Each member of the Committee compiled the data secured through the questionnaire and through the study of catalogues, and sent this data to the chairman. He made a complete and careful study and compilation of the data. This, together with some interpretations of the findings, the chairman included in his "Report of Progress," read before the Normal School Section of the National Council at the November meeting in 1916. These data are

made a part of this final report, so that students of the subject may have before them the facts as discovered in 1915-16.

The third task—and, of course, the most important one—was to formulate a set of basic principles by which teachers of English in normal schools should guide themselves in the organization and conduct of their work. The Committee had at first thought of outlining a course of study in English, but soon gave that up as impracticable and limited itself to a statement of principles. Seven of these principles were formulated and stated in the Committee's "Report of Progress," and were printed in the *English Journal* for January, 1917. These seven principles were announced only after the members of the Committee had studied thoroughly the whole problem of English teaching in the two-year normal school, had familiarized themselves with the facts brought out by the questionnaire, had consulted dozens of approved and successful courses of study, and had carried on correspondence with normal-school English teachers in all parts of the country. In this final report six of these seven tentative principles, after slight rearrangement and re-wording, are finally and definitely affirmed as representing the beliefs of the Committee, and four more principles have been agreed upon and are herein formulated.

The Committee realizes that, in spite of all the hard study it has done, these ten principles may be based to some extent upon the individual opinions and experiences of the members. But the data secured by means of the investigation, the ideas gained from examination of scores of catalogues and courses of study, the exchange of opinions in English councils and through correspondence, and above all the earnest thinking on this one subject for two years and a half—all this, the Committee believes, should give these principles more authority and validity than would be inherent in the personal dicta of any one individual or group of individuals. If the principles are accepted as general suggestions to be modified and adapted to conform to local conditions, as ideals toward which to work, they will be of sufficient service to the cause of English teaching in normal schools to recompense the Committee for the labor and time expended.

## II. FINAL TABULATION OF THE DATA CONTAINED IN THE QUESTIONNAIRES, AND A FEW INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DATA

1. The questionnaire was filled out and returned by 106 normal schools. When it is remembered that only about 225 questionnaires were sent out, and that there are only that number of normal schools in

the United States, it is evident that the Committee succeeded in obtaining information from a goodly proportion of schools. Every section of the country is represented, and almost every state.

2. Fifty-eight normal schools report that the normal-school English work is satisfactorily credited at near-by colleges and universities; 10 report the crediting unsatisfactory; 29 schools do not report on this question—which probably means that the crediting is not satisfactory in every respect.

Examination of the reports from the different sections of the United States reveals the fact that the crediting of normal-school English is most unsatisfactory in the New England states and in the South. Perhaps this can be accounted for in the case of the New England schools on the theory that the colleges and universities in this section of the country are old-fashioned in their entrance requirements and will not accept credits from normal schools. Another fact that may affect the crediting of normal-school English in the New England states is that the English work usually emphasizes special methods in English and review in elementary English, and is inclined to ignore strong, advanced, academic work in English.

In the case of the Southern states, where the condition of normal-school English is reported unsatisfactory, the trouble is probably that until very lately the normal schools have been not much more than high schools in their courses of study and faculty standards. It is evident that the teachers of normal-school English—that is, English in the courses beyond the four-year high school—should be, generally speaking, the equal in scholarship and experience of the teachers doing Freshman and Sophomore work in colleges and universities. In the Southern states this is often not the case.

On the whole, the English work done in normal schools receives fair consideration from colleges and universities. Where it does not, it seems to be because the English work is not advanced *academic* work, or because the teachers are not considered equal to the teachers in colleges and universities.

3. Our tabulation of the questionnaires shows that 104 of the 106 normal schools reporting have some work in methods of teaching English. Examination of the catalogues and printed courses of study reveals the fact, however, that in some schools the method work in English is nothing more than a few weeks' work in special-methods courses, wherein all the elementary subjects are treated. In 63 schools the English methods work is conducted by members of the English department, in 19 schools

by members of the education department, and in 22 schools by members of both departments.

In 83 schools the methods courses in English include practice-teaching, but in only 10 schools does the English department conduct the practice-teaching in English, and in 3 of these members of the education department—training teachers, perhaps—do part of the practice-teaching work.

We have, then, a very unusual situation: in most of the normal schools the courses in teaching how to teach English are conducted by members of the English department, but the actual practice-teaching of English is conducted by members of another department. Doubtless in most cases there is some connection between the theory of the English department and the practice of the education department; but we all know of normal schools where the two departments are antagonistic in the matter of theories in English teaching, and of normal schools where the two departments are apparently unaware of each other's existence.

4. The questionnaires give some information concerning specialization in English courses. Twenty-five normal schools offer courses in English for rural schools (usually in methods of teaching English in rural schools); 23 schools offer courses in teaching of high-school English; 11 schools offer courses in commercial English—presumably for those who expect to teach commercial branches; 1 school offers a course in journalism (elective); 1 school, a course in industrial English; and 1 school, in home-economics English—whatever they may be. Examination of courses of study shows that even when the school does not offer any other special work in English it offers work in English for primary teachers and English for upper-grade teachers.

The tendency to specialize in the English courses is less noticeable in New England than elsewhere—why, it is difficult to say, unless the normal schools in this region, being older than in other sections of the country, have their courses established more strongly by tradition.

At any rate, the tendency to specialize is evident; and in the judgment of the Committee this tendency is natural and desirable and shows *that normal-school teachers of English, generally, realize that the English work in normal schools is a special and specific kind of English work—not advanced high-school work or elementary college work.*

5. Another indication that English teachers in normal schools believe in normal-school English is the fact that about three-fourths of the normal schools reporting have either courses or work of some sort

in five special phases of English work, as follows: story-telling, 84 schools; dramatization, 75 schools; oral expression, 89 schools; use of books and libraries, 77 schools; children's literature, 88 schools. Unfortunately the wording of the questionnaire makes it impossible to determine whether this work consists of definite courses or is merely a part of the work in methods. Examination of a great many catalogues, however, shows that in most of the schools reporting some of this work is done in courses especially organized to prepare teachers for efficiency in these phases of English work.

In many of the schools the work in these special phases of English is done by the education department or the training teachers. In many schools the work in oral expression is done by a special teacher of elocution, who is often not a member of the English department. The courses in the use of books and libraries are generally given by the librarians, and are usually not considered as a part of the English work—at least, they are not so listed in most of the catalogues examined.

6. Thirty-nine normal schools maintain high-school departments, where, of course, English is taught. Most of these high-school departments are maintained because the normal departments have but recently been differentiated from the high-school departments. A standard normal-school course consists of two years beyond the standard, i.e., four-year, high-school course. In some states—notably Pennsylvania—the normal course consists of but four years beyond the elementary school. In the South and in some of the Western states only one year is required beyond the standard high-school course. Doubtless this condition will continue for some years to come. This means that high-school departments will be maintained in many normal schools. In other normal schools, high-school departments are kept up as model schools, as practice schools for high-school teachers. In either case the high-school department must be reckoned with, and the English work in the high-school departments must be under the direction of the English department.

The English work in these high-school departments might be considered as traditional high-school English—with, perhaps, slightly higher standards than are found in the average high school—or it might be considered as leading up more definitely to the normal-school courses in English. In 27 of the 39 schools having high-school departments the English work is given a professional trend—indicating, of course, that those who plan and conduct the English work in the high-school department think of the department as preparatory to the normal department.

The English work is given a professional trend in various ways: by selecting literature that deals with childhood and with teaching, and literature that is usually taught in the elementary school; by choosing educational subjects as themes for oral and written composition work; by emphasizing those phases of English that are of most consequence to teachers, such as story-telling, making out examination papers, etc.; by incidental discussion of the methods being used in the English classes.

On the whole, the questionnaires are unsatisfactory in this detail of the investigation. About all that can be drawn from the data is that in general the high-school courses in English are given a professional trend. Presumably this can be done without interfering seriously with the ordinary work of the high-school English course.

7. Answering question 7 of the questionnaire, nearly all the heads of the English departments find some details of their work unsatisfactory. There are, first of all, a number of general criticisms, such as English teachers would make in any school—high school or college. Here are some of them—they sound very familiar: classes too large; not enough teachers; too much work; too much written work; not enough time to give individual attention to students. Other criticisms are: English work not well motivated; not enough *practical* English; English teachers not well prepared; not enough library equipment.

All these criticisms, as has been said, are general, and as such have no significance in the present study—except to indicate that English teachers in normal schools labor under the same handicaps, real or imaginary, as their colleagues in other schools. But some of the criticisms strike at specifically *normal-school* English problems. Of course those answering the questionnaire have their individual notions about the weaknesses of their courses. One teacher, for example, thinks too much time is taken up with technical grammar; another teacher is sure that more time should be devoted to technical grammar—and perhaps both are right. Several reports state that too much time is given over to English-methods work, while some complaints are heard that academic work usurps the chief place.

Ignoring all these contradictory criticisms, we can discover that on a few points nearly all the teachers are agreed. Almost half the reports complain that not enough English is required in the normal school, and perhaps all the teachers would take this position if some English courses were not already required. Several criticisms are made of the weakness of the connection between the work in English methods

and the practice-teaching in English. Others are agreed that library courses are needed, or that the work in oral English should be strengthened. Some believe that too many elective literature courses are offered, and several express the opinion that the normal schools repeat too much of the high-school work in English, especially the survey courses in English and American literature. Three teachers make the broad general criticism that the English work in the normal schools is not distinctively *normal* work, that it merely copies after college work and does not prepare especially for teaching.

Much of this is not significant and has no bearing on our problems except in a very general way; but here and there, among these criticisms, are a few suggestions that should provoke careful thought. The Committee, trying to sift the evidence and looking forward to an attempt to construct a more uniform course in normal-school English, finds among these criticisms some definite and helpful ideas. In spite of the differences of opinion and the merely personal prejudices, it is evident that all over the country normal-school teachers of English have their eyes open to the fact that in the normal-school English something different from high-school English or college English should be done—something characteristic, something looking more or less specifically toward preparation for teaching.

8. The Committee had hoped to be able to present some general information on the organization of normal-school English, and had counted on that as the most important part of the preliminary study. But when we came to tabulate and organize the data we found it absolutely impossible to discover anything but the most general tendencies. It is amazing, the utter lack of anything approaching uniformity or standardization. The English courses in normal schools of the United States are, with a few exceptions, the result of the individual notions of the teachers in charge, or of the presidents of the schools. If the English teacher at the head of the department is a specialist in the drama, the English courses emphasize the technique of the drama, Shakespeare, the modern drama, dramatization, etc. If he is an advocate of technical grammar, he requires a semester's or a year's work in a good stiff grammar course. Apparently it has been a question, not of what the students want and need, but of what the teacher is most interested in, or in what he has had most success. Two or three states have uniform courses in English, and here and there one thinks he discovers faint traces of agreement among the schools in a certain section of the country. But for the most part each normal school has



been a law unto itself, and the coming of a new English teacher has meant the formulation of a new course in English.

The Committee despaired, therefore, of trying to tabulate data that would not add or subtract, multiply or divide, or come under any system of classification. It feels safe in offering only two bits of evidence: some figures showing the *number* of courses in the different phases of English work, and some statements indicating general tendencies.

The number of different courses listed in the catalogues of all the schools reporting is as follows: literature, 155, including history of English and American literature, 35 courses, but not counting courses in literature for children, 20 courses; grammar courses come next in number, there being 64 of these; composition, usually combined with rhetoric, appears 57 times; reading and expression rank next in popularity, with 53 courses; special methods in English follow, with 47 courses; other courses, such as library methods, spelling, oral English, story-telling, language, are given here and there.

It is understood that this enumeration takes no account of the length of the courses offered, whether certain courses are required, or elective, or at what time in the curriculum the courses are offered. As to the first points the catalogues do not give enough information; as to the last point there is no rule, and only faint indications of a tendency in any one direction. The fact that many of the courses are combination courses makes it almost impossible to tabulate the facts. On the assumption, which may not be warranted, that the courses are of the same length and receive the same crediting, it would seem that literature (excluding children's literature) is given three times as much attention as any other subject, and that the remaining subjects rank as follows: grammar, composition, reading and expression, special methods, and children's literature.

There seem to be evidences of a general tendency to put the advanced academic work in the Junior normal year and the professional English work in the Senior year. If any work is required, it is usually either advanced composition or special methods in English. But in most schools no English of any sort seems to be required.

Nearly every school offers a variety of elective courses in literature, ranging from *Beowulf* down to the *Saturday Evening Post*. There seems to be a tendency to offer courses in the more modern literature, however, rather than in the older, more traditional, literature. Most of the schools offer a course in grammar, which, however, is often combined with the work in composition.

In the New England states and in that part of the United States the English work seems to tend toward the professional, in the Southern states toward the academic, and in the Central and Western states toward a half-and-half division. This is but a *tendency*, however, and usually each school seems inclined to follow its own devices.

9. Comparatively few teachers paid any attention to that part of the questionnaire asking for suggestions on the proper course in English, with special emphasis on the proportion of academic and professional English. The few suggestions given in this part of the questionnaire the Committee will use in the next part of its work. It may be said, however, that, in the judgment of all those who stated a definite opinion on the subject, about 60 per cent of the English work should be academic in nature.

### III. PRINCIPLES UPON WHICH THE ENGLISH WORK IN A TWO-YEAR NORMAL COURSE SHOULD BE BASED

1. The primary aim of the English work in a normal school is to prepare teachers. English work specifically designed for this purpose is more important than general work in literature and composition.

2. The normal-school work in English should, in general, not repeat the work of the high school nor parallel the work of the college.

3. At least half the time required in English work in the normal school should be devoted to "professional" English, which is intended to include children's literature and methods of teaching the English subjects. This work should be under the direction of the English department, and should, if possible, be done by the head of the department. The work of practice-teaching in the English subjects should be—at least, in part—under the supervision of the English department.

4. The academic courses in literature should be the ones that have as much specific value for those intending to teach as is consistent with general cultural value. To this end courses in the modern magazine, the short story, contemporary fiction, history of *American* literature, etc., should be given precedence over such courses as Anglo-Saxon, Milton's poetry, the Queen Anne period, etc.

5. The composition work should be made to serve two purposes: the general purpose of Freshman college composition courses and also the specific purpose of preparing the students to teach more effectively. This may be done by the selection of theme subjects and theme forms having close relation to the work of teaching; by stressing

oral composition, especially exposition; and, in general, by making the work throughout extremely practical.

6. All students entering the Junior class of a two-year normal school should be tested for proficiency in the practical English arts required of a teacher. (Some of these arts are: penmanship, spelling, story-telling, reading aloud, and effective, correct speech—in general, English as a means of teaching.) If any student fails to measure up to a reasonable standard of proficiency in any of these arts, he should be required to enter a special class in that subject until he has reached such a standard.

7. A brief course in grammar should be given to all those who expect to teach in the high school or the upper grades of the elementary school. This course should aim at giving students a mastery of the science of grammar, with some rudiments of historical grammar. (It will be understood that this is not the grammar which should be taught children; it is to be given in the normal school only because teachers should know much more grammar than they are called upon to teach.)

8. As many special courses in English should be given as the environment of the normal school makes necessary. Among such courses may well be: English for foreigners, English in rural schools, business English.

9. The courses in composition should be offered in the Junior year and the work in professional English in the Senior year. Other courses may be distributed to suit the convenience and needs of the particular school.

10. If any English work is *required* (except that suggested in 5 and 6, above) it should be: first, professional English; secondly, composition; thirdly, literature.

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